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John Lambert Cadwalader

[New York]

1915

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John Lambert Cadwalader; an appreciation. Read at
the opening of the Trenton public library, April 6, 1915,
by Henry W. Taft. (New York), 1915.
11 p. 23 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm.

1. Cadwalader, John Lambert, 1836-1914.

Library of Congress CT275.C14T2 15-20216

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DATE FILMED: 1/16/97

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John Lambert Cadwalader

An Appreciation



Read at the Opening of the Trenton Public Library

April 6, 1915

By HENRY W. TAFT

John Lambert Cadwalader

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An Appreciation



Read at the Opening of the Trenton Public Library

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By HENRY W. TAFT

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JOHN LAMBERT CADWALADER

John Lambert Cadwalader had none of that kind of reputation which sometimes vaguely emerges from the glamour of public life; for he had held but one office and that for only a brief period many years ago. But his services to institutions for the dissemination among the people of knowledge and culture, his leadership in his profession, the influence of his interesting personality and high character, and the friendship and respect which he commanded among the foremost men of his time, justly entitle him to be regarded as an American citizen of high distinction.

Mr. Cadwalader was born at Trenton on November 17, 1836, and died in the city of New York on March 11, 1914, in the seventy-eighth year of his age. His ancestors had from Colonial days been persons of consequence in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. He graduated at Princeton College in 1856; and he was for many years one of its most active trustees. He attended the Harvard Law School; and after graduating there he practiced law in New York City until he became, in 1874, Assistant Secretary of State of the United States, in the administration of General Grant. After leaving the State Department in 1876 he made a journey of observation around the world, during which he visited many interesting places in the Orient not then readily accessible. Upon his return to New York he resumed the practice of the law. In 1869 he had been one of the small number of lawyers who united in founding the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, which grew out of a movement to elevate

the judiciary of the State which had fallen into disrepute during the Tweed regime. Many years afterwards he became the president of the Association — an honor generally regarded as denoting leadership at the Bar of New York.

That Mr. Cadwalader gained high repute as a lawyer was not due to exceptional erudition nor yet to uncommon powers of advocacy. It was still less due to his willingness to yield to the tendency of modern conditions which too often obscure high professional ideals by expecting from a lawyer that he shall also be a man of business or even have some share in his client's enterprises. But Mr. Cadwalader was one of the old type of lawyers who assisted his clients to a wise solution of their difficulties or, if a contest was inevitable, delighted to "strive mightily" for the protection of their rights. His ability to summarize and state to a Court in terse and incisive phrase the substance of a controversy was surpassed by few, if any, lawyers of his time, while his instinctive sense of justice gave him a grasp of principles which made him less prone than most men to a reliance upon a "codeless myriad of precedents." No lawyer could more readily (I had almost said gaily) divest himself of the encumbrance of technicalities and penetrate to the heart of a situation. While he was practical, sympathetic and always helpful, he never resorted to indirection or other tortuous expedients. He was especially effective where seemingly irreconcilable differences were to be composed. In such matters he long occupied a unique position as an adviser; and with years and experience he grew to be one of those rare individuals whom a community invests with the character of a sage.

But it is his unselfish and fruitful services to the public that compel us to pay signal honor to his memory. His reputation was closely linked with the New York Public Library, and at the time of his death he was president of its board of trustees. More, perhaps, than to any other man was it due to him that that institution was established on a foundation broad and permanent. This was the culmination of many years of useful service to the public libraries of the city. And those who seek in heredity the springs of human action will find peculiar interest in the fact that Mr. Cadwalader's great-grandfather, Dr. Thomas Cadwalader, for many years a Colonial Councillor of Pennsylvania, was one of the first board of directors of The Library Company of Philadelphia, founded in 1731 largely through the efforts of Benjamin Franklin, who describes it in his autobiography as the "mother of all North American subscription libraries," and in the further fact — of especial interest on this occasion — that this same Doctor Cadwalader, having been in 1746 the first Burgess of Trenton, himself established in that place prior to 1750, a public library, some of the volumes of which are still extant. While these early essays in library work were for many years necessarily on a limited scale, they contained the germ of an idea, long since generally accepted, that it is necessary to afford to a self-governing people opportunities for enlightenment if their institutions are long to endure. And it is of the greatest interest to contrast the pioneer efforts of Franklin and his coadjutors in 1731, with the foundation, nearly two centuries later, of the magnificent institution in New York which, in the opportunities extended to the public for learning and research, and in the convenient access to good literature

afforded by the circulating department, promises soon to surpass any similar institution in the world.

Mr. Cadwalader had been a trustee of the Astor Library, and early saw the importance of finding some means of availing of a large bequest of Samuel J. Tilden, so that it could be used in bringing together the Lenox Library, the Astor Library and a large number of smaller libraries in one vast institution. Many legal difficulties had to be removed by legislation, which was largely devised by him. When that was obtained it still remained to weld together the existing libraries, many of which were loath to surrender their autonomy and independence. Due largely, however, to the constructive genius of Mr. Cadwalader and to his indomitable persistence, tactful wisdom and practical experience, a plan was carried through by which there was established upon an enduring foundation one of the greatest consultation and circulating libraries of modern times. The difficulties in reaching this result seemed at the outset insurmountable; and the solution of the problem, as the then President of the United States said at the public opening of the library building, "required genius and statesmanship."

The rare aptitude of Mr. Cadwalader for work of this character led to his services being much sought for in connection with other institutions of a public, though not of a political or governmental, character. At the time of his death he was a trustee of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History and the New York Zoological Society, all in the city of New York; while he was closely connected as trustee with the organization and management of the Carnegie Institution of Wash-

ington, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The duties of these trusteeships were never performed in a perfunctory manner; for he devoted much of his time to them, being always one of that minority upon whom the burden of such work usually falls and on whose enthusiasm successful results always depend. Of frail physique, the burden was heavy, but his was a spirit which would not suffer, to the day of his death, even a partial retirement from such activities as these.

Three universities, Pennsylvania, Princeton and Harvard, conferred upon Mr. Cadwalader the degree of LL. D. He was justly proud of this distinction; for while his achievements were of undoubted merit they were not of the kind which usually evoke academic honors from so many of our great universities.

Mr. Cadwalader was the intimate friend and constant companion of many of the most eminent men in the councils of the nation and in the world of science and art. Such Americans as his brother-in-law Dr. Weir Mitchell, Colonel Higginson, Frank Millet, Dr. Billings, J. Pierpont Morgan, Senator Root, James C. Carter, Dr. McBurney, Whitelaw Reid and Joseph H. Choate were some of those numbered among his companions; while at his hospitable home in the Scotch Highlands he gathered Englishmen distinguished in statesmanship, art and learning. Among these he was esteemed for his high character, his brilliant wit, the constancy of his friendship, his refined but cordial hospitality and his wise counsels. He had a genius for friendship, and was a believer in the saying that "life is to be fortified by many friendships." He had great vivacity in conversation; and his pointed comment and witty repartee constantly en-

livened the circle of his friends. This is an aspect of his personality which only those who enjoyed his intimacy can well appreciate; for the play of his wit was so spontaneous and its point so dependent on its pertinency to a quickly passing situation, that an attempt to reproduce instances would do him scant justice; and yet this quality played a large part in making him a charming companion. His devotion to the rod and the gun must receive a word, since salmon fishing, grouse shooting and other such diversions he truly loved; and he had difficulty in seeing how there was any salvation for a man whose soul was dead to the fascination of such sports.

The way in which Mr. Cadwalader expressed his intention to make a gift to this library cannot but evoke a smile from those who knew him well, for it recalls the amusingly ingenious ways in which he concealed his benefactions or disparaged his acts of personal kindness. He desired, as he wrote to your president, that the library should be made "as efficient as any in the state," that he should have "no recognition in any way," because he had "no motive other than to benefit the subject." And he would have deprecated, probably forbidden, such a demonstration as this; for in such things he was diffident to the point of shyness, and more than content with a sense of duty well performed.

It was his devotion to the place of his birth, mingled with a just pride in his New Jersey ancestors, that turned his mind to the historical city of Trenton and led to the benefaction which made possible the completion of this beautiful and commodious library building. In the Revolutionary War, in the establishment of our National government and in the public affairs of New Jersey and Pennsylvania,

the Cadwalader family had borne a conspicuous part. He was accustomed to say of his forbears that they had done "something of account," usually adding, as if to disavow an intention to boast, a humorous comment on some foible which family tradition had preserved. But in truth his ancestors had enjoyed distinction in the affairs of state and nation and were of those entitled to stand high in the ranks of that kind of aristocracy which exacts high ideals, self-abnegation and patriotic, faithful and efficient service. To such ancestors as these a lofty monument might fitly have been erected, but it would have been alien to his nature for him to preserve their memory in that way; for his whole life showed his belief that "monuments themselves memorials need." And no memorial could be more true to the character of John L. Cadwalader than that which associates him and his family name with the idea of service to the people of this city by affording to them an adequate opportunity for the pursuit of knowledge.

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